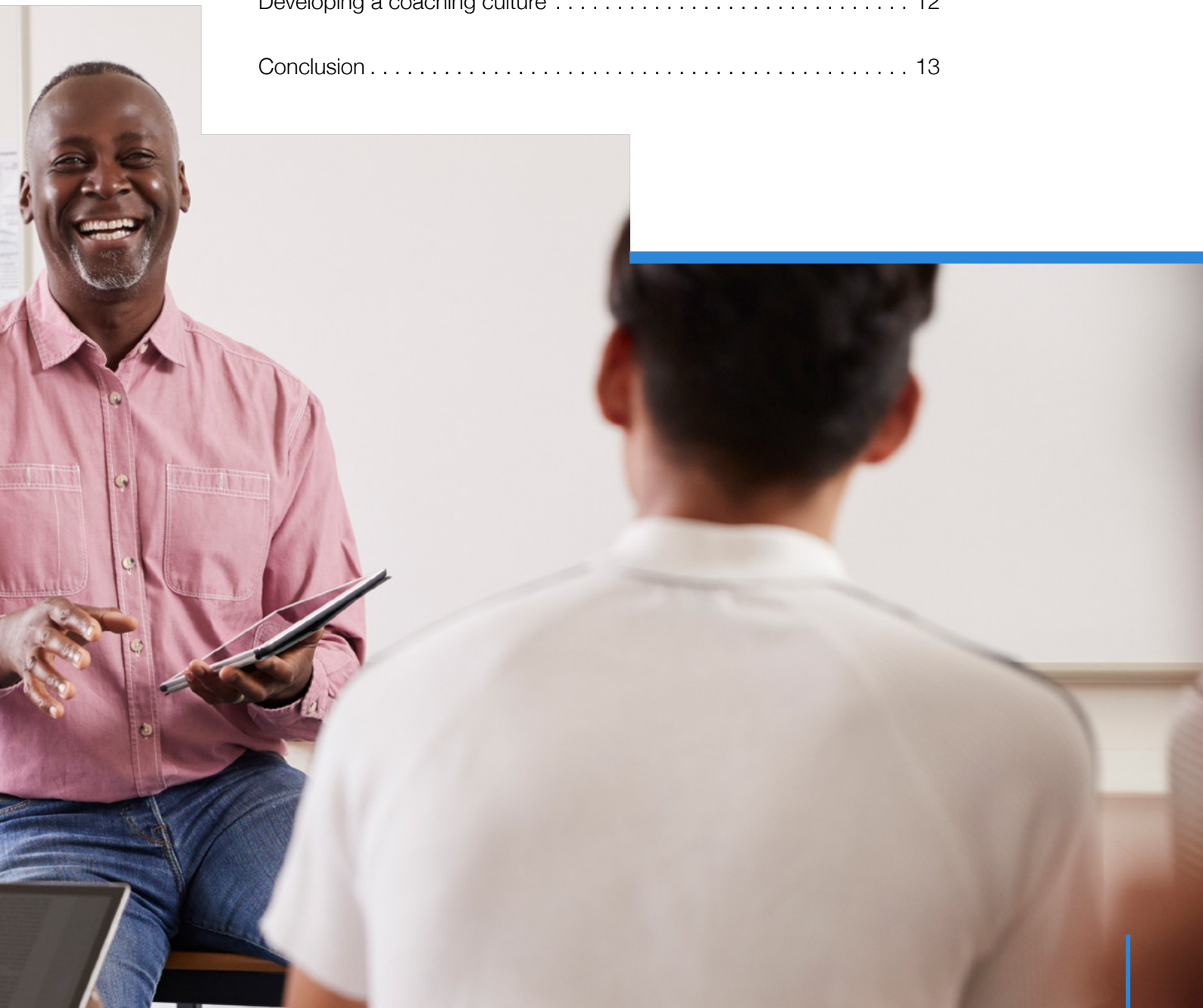

Coaching and Medical Affairs – the View from the Frontline

How blending hard science with communications skills can land messages, build trust, and secure long term advantages.



Contents

Introduction	3
Coaching – The Data	4
The Medical Manager’s View	5
The MSL View	6
Frontline Insight	7
Developing a coaching culture	12
Conclusion	13



Introduction

The digital revolution continues to reshape healthcare and life sciences with medical affairs at the epicentre of its enormous potential.

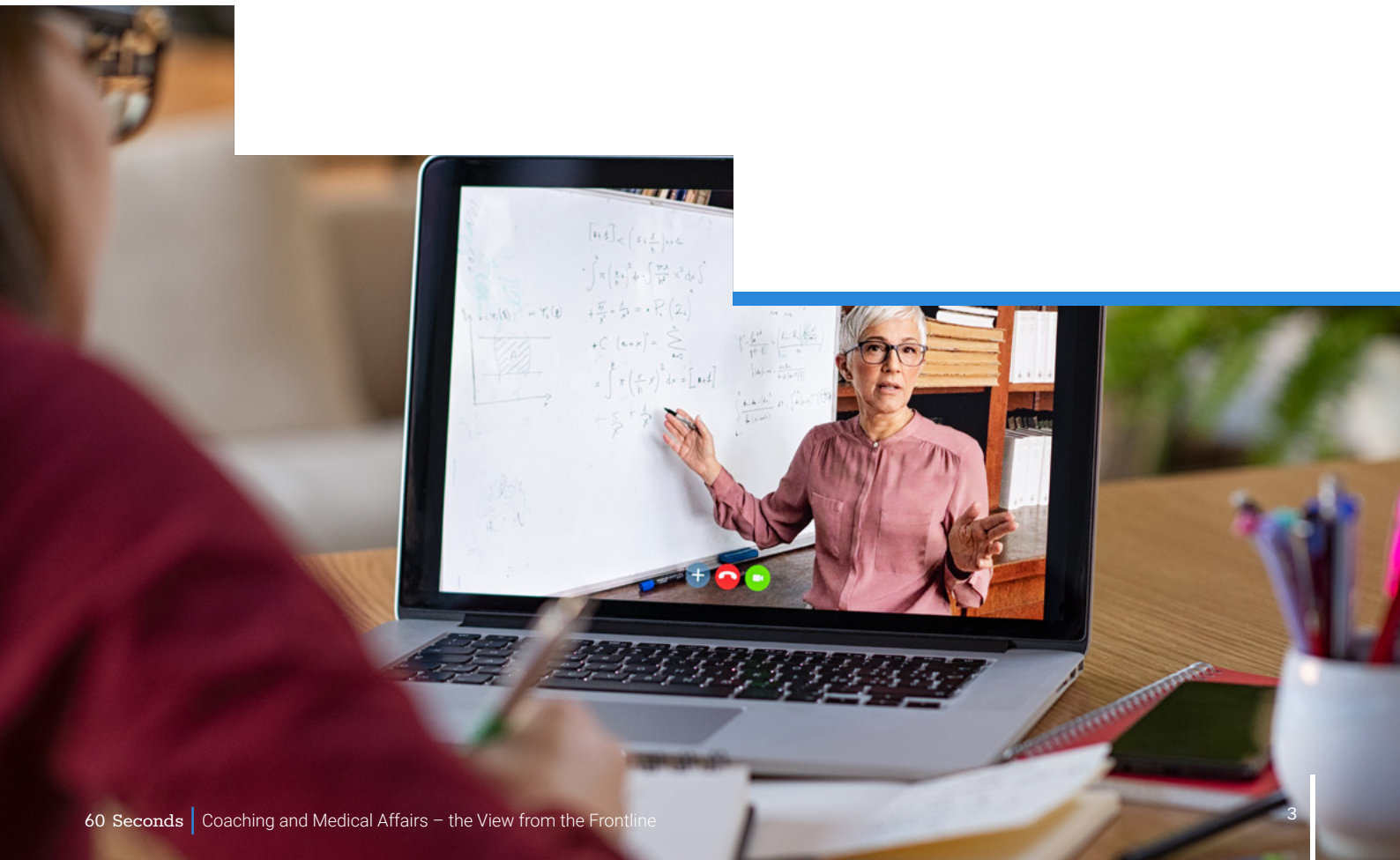
MSLs are the spearpoint of a fast-paced environment where transformative therapies and exciting ways of delivering them are part of a dynamic landscape riven with sudden challenges and opportunities.

The role of MSL teams is essential to success. Preparing them to meet upheavals and operate effectively is now a core skill.

These are critical times for the pharmaceutical industry which is experiencing record levels of investment in digital and biotech futures. The World Bank has invested almost \$4 billion in the arena over the last decade¹ while the World Health Organisation believes that digital and cutting edge technologies will help 3 billion more people enjoy better health.²

Yet, coaching medical managers and MSL teams remains a relative backwater. This whitepaper, driven by frontline insights from exclusive research and testimony from industry professionals, explores why coaching and a growth mindset can benefit individuals and organisations, and how barriers to implementing coaching cultures can be resolved.

This whitepaper combines a detailed survey of practicing medical affairs managers and MSLs and their testimonies to explore the true value of coaching. This unique combination of data and industry experiences gives the clearest evidence of its worth and exposes the barriers that are preventing more organisations benefitting from instilling a coaching culture.



Coaching – The Data

Coaching is increasingly being valued as a vital component of an organisation’s engagement strategy with influential HCPs yet 69% of companies have no established framework to upskill frontline workforces.

Disturbingly, 83% of MSLS report that coaching is not viewed as a high priority at work with 81% reporting that no structure for personal development, outside of technical training, exists.

The findings were revealed in an exclusive survey of medical managers and MSLS operating at a range of pharmaceutical companies operating around the world. Both senior medical manager and frontline MSLS cohorts painted a picture of disjointed and ad hoc approaches to coaching.

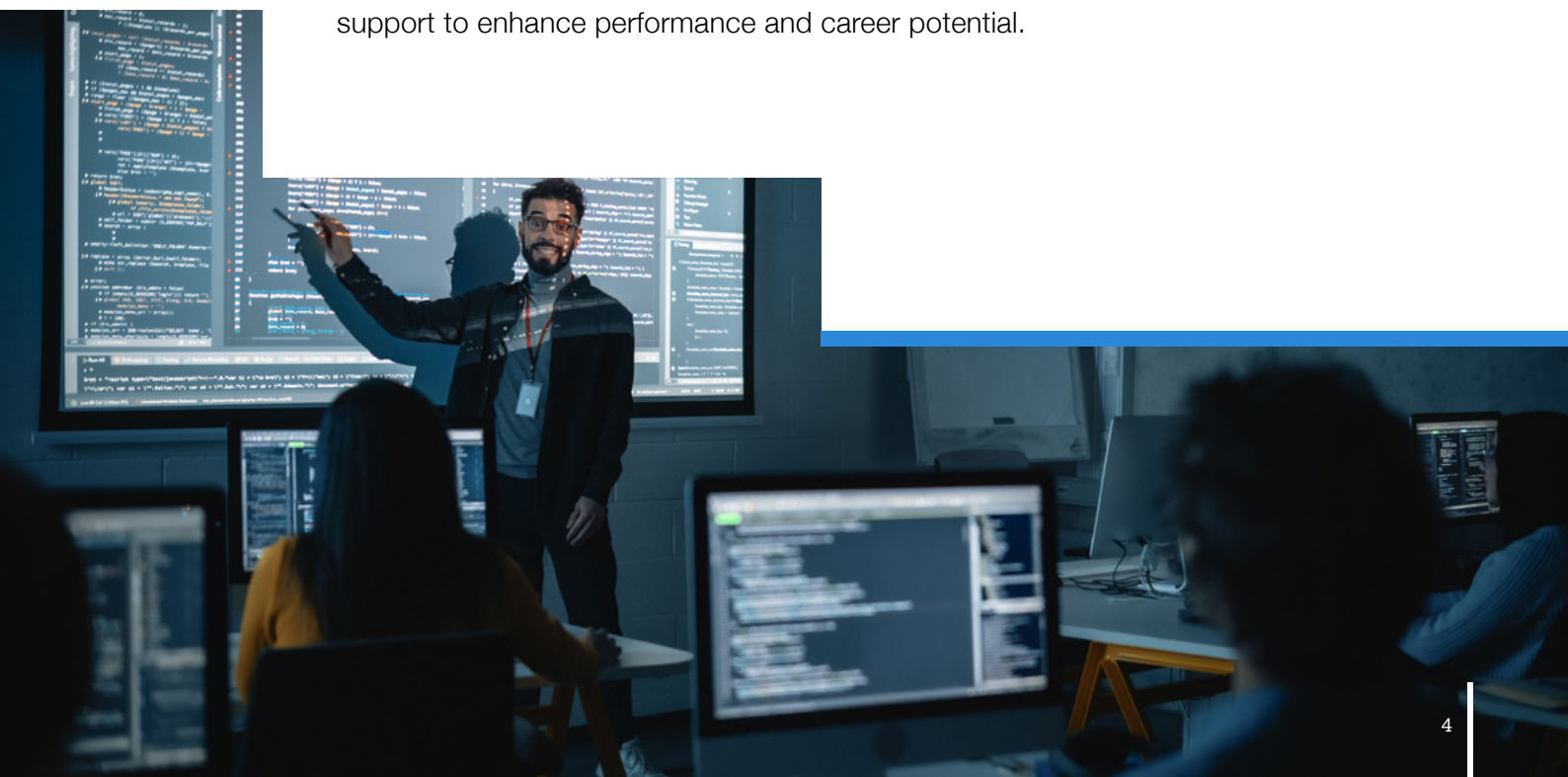
“There is a growing awareness that dedicated coaching will reap rewards but, too often, good intentions evaporate because of a lack of commitment and application. This places MSLS, who need to navigate a changing engagement landscape, at a disadvantage and can lead to lost opportunities,” said Marcus West, founder and CEO of 60 Seconds, a ground-breaking coaching initiative.

“We commissioned the research because we wanted to get first-hand evidence about how coaching was perceived and delivered. The results clearly identify a coaching vacuum with medical managers not being equipped enough to drive effective programmes and MSLS getting sporadic opportunities at a time when they need to enhance their skills to connect with a varied and mobile cohort of HCPs.”

The research, which surveyed experienced medical affairs managers and MSLS, provides a unique insight into coaching set-ups across some of the most successful and dynamic organisations in industry.

Results show a fractured environment for both disciplines yearning for more support to enhance performance and career potential.

“There is a growing awareness that dedicated coaching will reap rewards.”



The Medical Manager's View

Often, medical managers are thrust into a role with coaching responsibilities without a clear vision, or direction, of how to implement and use it to drive corporate improvement.

Significantly, 61% of those medical managers surveyed said they were not well equipped to coach their teams effectively and efficiently and 85% said they did not have enough time to dedicate to coaching.

The lack of structure was underscored by 78% stating that their organisation did not have coaching KPIs in place and that, where coaching models exist, only 35% feeling their teams were trained and up-skilled to implement it.

The gap between the desire for effective coaching and its existence was laid bare by 94% of respondents believing that more regular and effective coaching practices would lead to improved results and outcomes for their teams. By contrast, only 5% said their organisation showed a full commitment to coaching.

The read-outs become more compelling with comments from respondents saying that regular coaching would deliver 'continuity, objectivity and dynamic evolution' and highlighting a need for 'a concrete model which I could deploy across a range of coaching interactions.'

Further comments underpinned benefits such as 'learning from others, being given time and resources to develop coaching methods and systems within the company' and that they wanted the ability to deliver 'regular coaching using a clear model, consistently delivered.'



The MSL View

MSLs, who are increasingly being asked to apply their scientific knowledge to fast-moving, agile HCPs, feel even more adrift by the lack of coaching in their organisations.

Despite the new engagement elements to their role, there is a distinct lack of opportunity for personal performance growth with opportunities often limited to training exercise that major on the presentation of data and statistics.

The study, which surveyed MSLs with five to seven years' experience in industry, uncovered significant structural flaws in how organisations prepare frontline staff to connect and liaise with HCPs.

Only 17% said coaching had a high priority in their company with only 19% benefitting from a defined coaching framework and 69% stating that coaching was provided on an ad hoc basis with no effectiveness measurement.

“I want more coaching on effective delivery of complex data in a more engaging manner.”

The vast majority (73%) felt they were not coached often enough and only 18% of MSLs rated the coaching they do receive as 'highly valuable'.

The overwhelming statistic that 92% of respondents want more coaching should be a wake-up call for organisations seeking to reinforce or improve their market share and ensure their therapies reach as many patients as possible.

Their personal responses indicate a hunger to learn new skills that is not being met.

Their comments are clear: 'I want more coaching on effective delivery of complex data in a more engaging manner' and 'I want help in responding to and adapting to different KOL styles and personalities I come across' and, tellingly: 'getting my story delivery right and to the point'.



Frontline Insight

The survey findings were echoed through the experiences of experts operating on the medical affairs frontline. Here, a senior medical manager and leader and an MSL at the start of her career discuss the relevance and importance of coaching to their personal development and their organisation's success.



Leona Blustein, Head of US Medical Science Liaison at Idorsia, a leading biopharmaceutical company, is an experienced MSL practitioner, manager and leader with almost 20 years industry experience.



Alyssa Trener, is an MSL at embecta, which supplies insulin-delivery technology to 30 million patients in more than 100 countries.

Have you experienced good coaching and how did it fit in with your working practice?

Leona: I really enjoyed the coaching I had that took place consistently over a year rather than just an isolated episode of a coaching session. My self-awareness grew over time and that certainly helped with my performance overall.

I think a lot of people come into coaching with not the best attitude; they think they know everything and that it will be a waste of time. Those are clearly the ones who will get the least out of it. If you have an open mindset then you will benefit.

It is a time commitment and that is not always easy with busy schedules; when I saw coaching on my calendar, I was excited at the prospect but could think of lots of things I should be doing so you really need someone to hold you accountable. I would try to postpone and my coach would say 'You really need to be there'. It works best as a two-way effort from the person being coached and the coach.

Alyssa: I'm still at the start of my journey but when I first joined and entered the MSL role, a senior colleague was critical in my professional development. I came from an academic background and wanted to make sure I communicated all the information possible in my presentations. I was detail oriented and wanted to hit every point.

He really changed my mindset and coached me in a positive way, helping me understand that HCPs don't have a lot of time so you can't stick rigidly to slides. It changed my work style. He would say 'Just do a sentence or two per slide. That's it. Keep it short and sweet and the information will stick'.

I was just finishing a Fellowship programme so had that academic style but, in the real world, people don't have time for that.

Initially, it was really hard and against my instincts to synthesise the information and create a story. But we had regular meetings where I would present and he would correct me in real time and that repetitive feedback was invaluable.

The data is important and it is great to share but it is important to have the human awareness that an HCP might have other more pressing things they want to talk about, and the presentation goes to the side, and you can just answer their most pressing questions.

“He really changed my mindset and coached me in a positive way, helping me understand.”

What qualities can coaching advance?

Alyssa: Communication is a core skill that a lot of MSLs possess. It is part of the job and having scientific knowledge and emotional intelligence make a great MSL. Establishing and maintaining relationships is a huge part of the work, so anything that makes that more achievable is worthwhile.

Having that understanding and that empathy for what an HCP does goes a long way and I absolutely think it's an added value. Part of being an MSL is being an educator, a teacher, and exploring ways of helping people be the best they can is essential.

“Every year it does try to push us to get some professional development.”

We can learn from others within the organisation as we have similar experiences and maybe working on similar products but it is also good to bring in some new ideas and apply them.

Should coaching be high on an organisation's agenda?

Leona: It should be but it is a struggle with all the other priorities, especially at a leadership level. You need to commit to coaching and understand that it involves your time and resources.

Alyssa: I work in a relatively small company but every year it does try to push us to get some professional development. I've certainly benefitted from coaching.



Do organisations place enough emphasis on coaching?

Leona: It should be there to develop skill sets for MSLs, managers and leaders but sometimes companies don't have the time allocated or the resources to be able to train people on how to be a great leader. Oftentimes, individuals are appointed into managerial roles so having a coach who can help develop a manager into a true leader will help make sure that individual is stronger and better suited for that position.

Of course, resources are an issue and cost is a big deterrent. It is an investment and it can be costly and, therefore, a company needs to dedicate time and resources if they want to help develop their people.

Alyssa: I can understand the difficulties because it is not part of the day-to-day schedule. You have to keep the business rolling so coaching gets pushed and pushed out therefore it would be advisable to incorporate it into a structured plan. A lot of MSLs are self-starters and you just have to put it in your calendar and commit to making time for it.

“We have lots of contact points each week which are on-the-job coaching opportunities.”

My manager is a former MSL and she is phenomenal at ensuring we get professional development and we have lots of contact points each week which are on-the-job coaching opportunities where I can learn from her experience how to deliver information to questions so that aspect is important too.



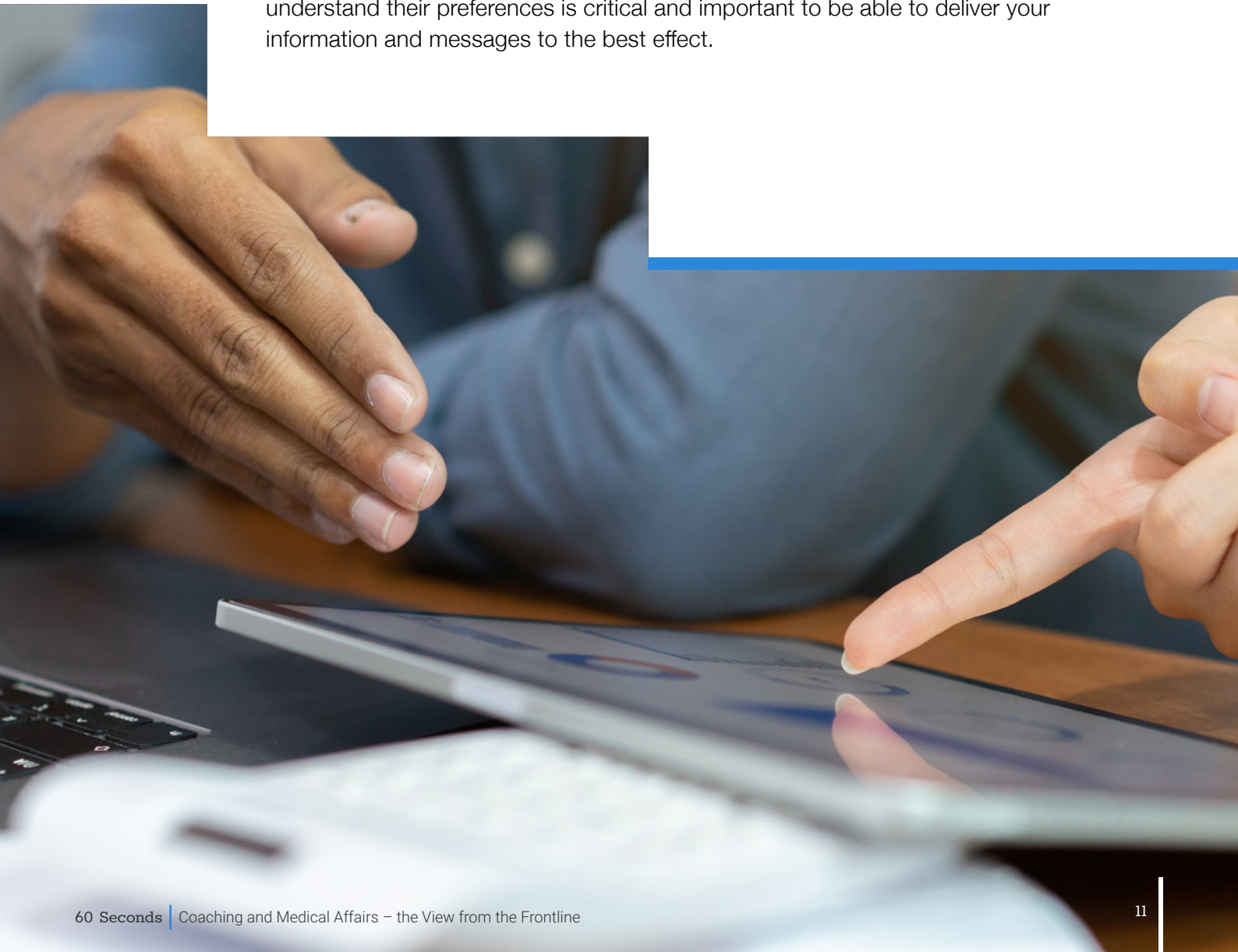
Can Medical Affairs Managers and MSLs progress their performance and careers without coaching?

Leona: There's an assumption that people in leadership roles do not need coaching and if they do want it they should find it on their own basis through professional development. It is a key resource in medical affairs particularly as the sector is going through so much change and advancement. It is needed to develop the right mindset to deal with hybrid approach and technological changes. For me, it's about understanding the changes that are occurring, and how to lead a team and motivate them in a time such as this. There has been incredible change since COVID and we all need to adapt.

Alyssa: The lessons from all sorts of coaching can be so useful. When I joined it was during COVID and I was able to hop on calls on part of my development. I could see HCPs walking around, making time in between patients, and in that moment you can see the pressures they are under and have respect for time being flexible. Learning to have a more human reaction, having the space to give them options is something that has helped me.

I think the second you say that you are not growing, you are effectively limiting yourself. There is always room to grow. That phrase is used a lot but it is true and important. You have to keep working on your own development.

Every MSL has their own style of delivering information and, likewise, the people on the other end have different ways of receiving that information. Being able to understand their preferences is critical and important to be able to deliver your information and messages to the best effect.



Developing a coaching culture

Many organisations have some form of 'coaching' in place but medical managers and staff need to commit to it as a fundamental part of growth, performance and success. To avoid it becoming disjointed, ad hoc, and less effective, five principles can be adopted:

- 1 Create a Model**

The benefits are magnified when coaching is enshrined in schedules so that both medical managers and MSLs can feel the programme has direction and purpose that leads to positive results. Coaching as a floating asset that is deployed sporadically can be unsettling and lead to poor results.
- 2 Commit to the Process**

Make time in the diary and commit to an agreed cadence. Value coaching across the organisation so it is seen as a career enhancement rather than a remedial event.
- 3 Growth Mindset**

Have a clear vision of what benefits coaching can bring so that staff can understand why it is in place. This requires clear explanation of the activity and how it can be applied in a way that's personally positive and professionally useful.
- 4 Make it Practical**

The best coaching is in tune with personal and professional requirements and an organisation's goals. Introduce examples from recent events at work so that the coach and employee can explore how to improve approach and performance.
- 5 Chart the Journey**

Make sure the coaching does not exist in isolation. Making notes along the way encourages understanding and reflection of progress. It also proves the process.



“They need to ensure that relationships are sustained with trust and understanding that goes beyond the exchange of information.”

Conclusion

The way organisations connect with KOLs and HCPs has changed fundamentally since the pandemic and MSLs are now required to provide extra layers of value to the scientific knowledge that characterises their background. They need to ensure that relationships are sustained with trust and understanding that goes beyond the exchange of information.

These are nuanced interpersonal skills that need regular coaching over a dedicated period with a growth mindset at the heart of the practice. The MSL is the main route for a pharmaceutical company to get its message heard and more than ever the hard science needs to be accompanied by the soft skills that help messages land, foster trust and encourage long-term collaboration.

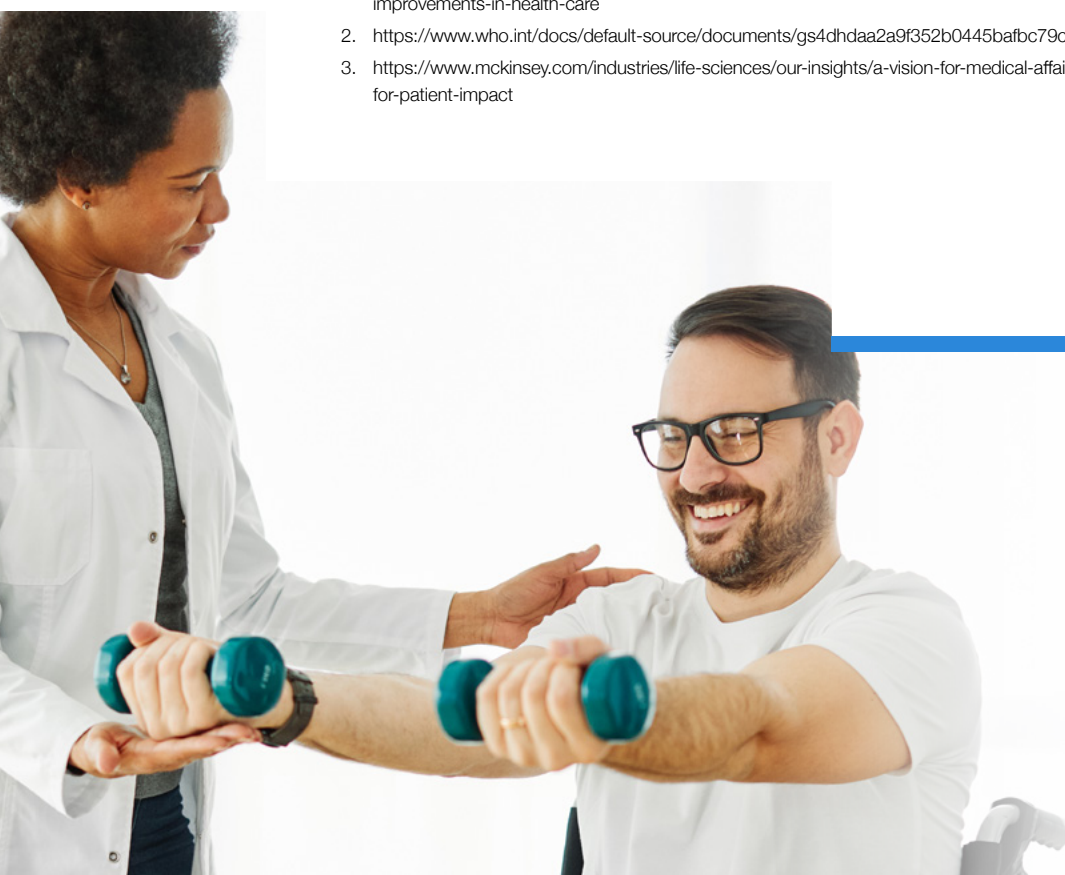
This whitepaper brings exclusive survey data and frontline insights into sharp focus both endorsing the power of coaching and the highlighting issues of time, resources and negative attitudes that can reduce its efficacy.

Medical Affairs teams are being looked on as a third pillar of pharmaceutical companies alongside commercial and R&D at a time when McKinsey data reveals that HCPs and patients have access to 75% more assets per indication compared to a decade ago.³ Combined with new and diverse digital methods of engagement, the need to empower leaders and MSLs is paramount and mission-critical.

The exclusive data, drawn from contributors from all sectors of global pharma, is the first true lens on a vital part of the corporate success jigsaw at a time when medical affairs is being seen as the most influential aspect of an organisation's success.

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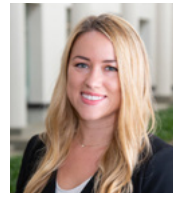
About the Interviewees



Leona Blustein

Leona Blustein is a pharmacist by training and an MBA who has worked across a range of medical affairs roles including MSL, medical affairs operations and leading

teams. She has driven excellence and progression at companies such as Arena Pharmaceuticals, Actelion and Johnson & Johnson as well as start-ups. Her current role is National MSL Leader at Idorsia Pharmaceuticals. Experienced healthcare professional with strong project management skills. Highly proficient at balancing multiple ongoing projects and coordinating activities of team members. Cross-functional experience in industry and academia. Influences others with credible personal presence, logic, and awareness of business priorities. Therapeutic area of expertise: Orphan/Rare diseases, Cardiopulmonary, Neuroscience, Gastroenterology (GI), Cardiovascular (CV), Dermatology.



Alyssa Trenerly

Alyssa Trenerly is Medical Science Liaison at embecta, a spin off from Beckton Dickinson where she started her MSL journey. She is a pharmacy graduate of the South

Carolina College of Pharmacy, holds a Masters in Public Health and was Global Health Economics & Outcomes Research Diabetes Care Post-Doctoral Fellow with MCPHS. Alyssa worked with Palmetto Health before joining The University of South Carolina as a Cancer Genetics Lab Researcher.

About 60 Seconds



60 Seconds

Clearer Communication

60 Seconds is a remote coaching app designed to help users communicate with greater clarity through practice, coaching and measurement. It was built by a coach for coaches to deliver measurable learning momentum.

60seconds.com

Contact CEO and founder, Marcus West at marcus@60seconds.com



60 Seconds

Clearer Communication

Practice, Coaching, Measurement